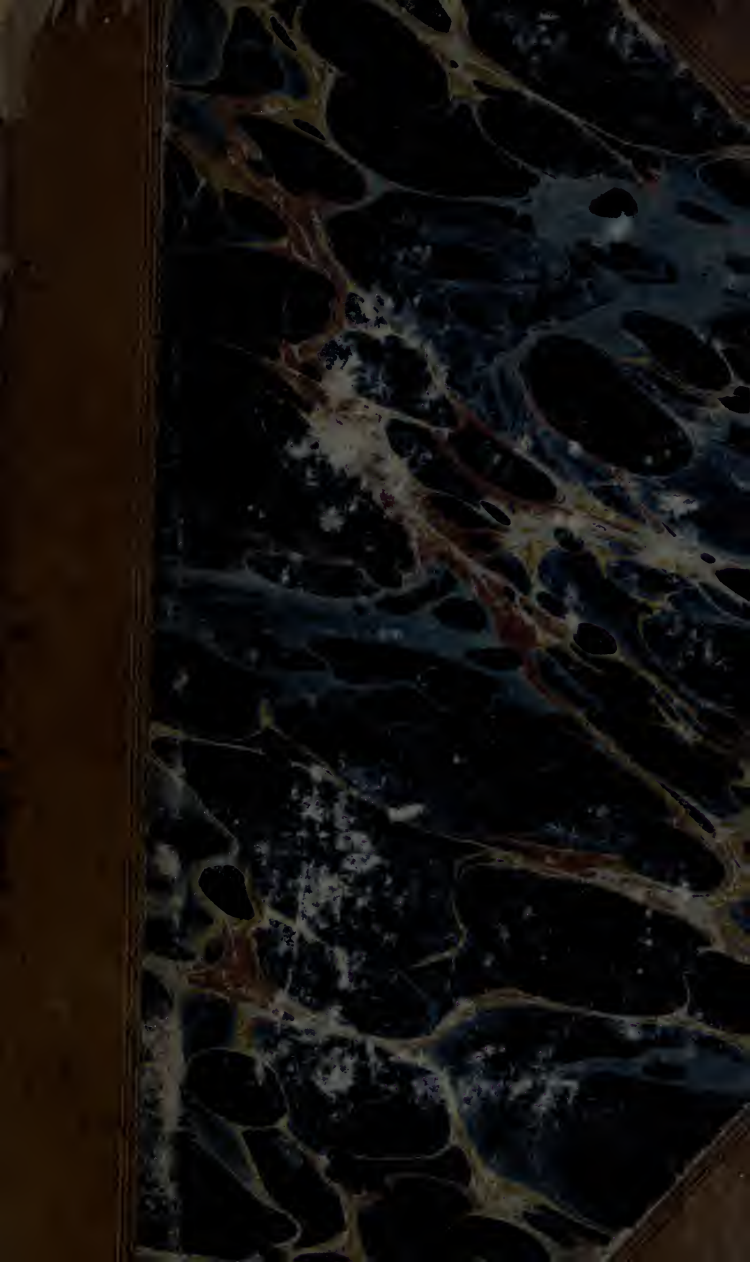




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THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN'S PRAYER AND EXPECTATION.

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## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF ST. PETER,

COLCHESTER,

ON SUNDAY EVENING, AUGUST 18, 1833.

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BY THE

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*This Sermon, written without any idea of publication, is sent to the press as preached, at the earnest request of many of the Congregation, who trust that it may be made useful to the Young.*

## SERMON.

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Psalm xc. 14.

“O SATISFY US EARLY WITH THY MERCY; THAT WE MAY REJOICE  
AND BE GLAD ALL OUR DAYS.”

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THIS forms part of a prayer, which Moses, the man of God, taught the youth of Israel to offer up in the wilderness. Their fathers, who came out of Egypt, had perished in that wilderness. They had provoked the Lord to anger by their rebellion, and he had sworn in his wrath that they should not enter into his rest. Doubtless, however, many among them, though they never entered upon the possession of the promised land, found admission into the inheritance among the saints in light; but it was reserved for their children to receive the promise of the earthly Canaan, and as they journeyed thither, they were instructed in the remembrance of the sins of their fathers, and the assurance of the loving-kindness of God, to pray in the comprehensive language of my text, “O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days.”

And surely the prayer which became the youth of Israel *then*, is well suited to the young in the present day. “We are journeying to the land of which the Lord hath said, I will give it you;” and from time to time some solemn memorial is brought before our eyes of the shortness and uncertainty of our earthly pilgrimage. “Our fathers, where are they?” Carried away “as with a flood!” Ourselves, where shall we soon be? “Gone, flown away, as a sleep—as yesterday, when it is past—and as a watch in the night.” And you, my dear young friends, who now, in the morning of life, are “flourishing and growing up,” will, ere long, be cut down, and withered, and the place that knew you will know you again no more for ever. How can I better consult your highest interests and welfare than by encouraging you now, in life’s early prime, to seek “so to number your days as that you may apply your hearts

unto wisdom." True wisdom lies in being wise for eternity; and one of the first signs of that wisdom is when the youthful heart begins to pray. While, therefore, we approach the throne of grace on your behalf and our own, saying, in the latter verses of this Psalm, "Let thy work appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it"—be it your care to lift up your hearts to that God who has been his people's "dwelling-place in all generations"—through that Saviour who has promised they that seek him early shall find him—by that Holy Spirit, who is the spirit of supplication in the hearts of his people, and say, with earnest importunity, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

In these words are contained a fervent supplication for the early experience of Divine mercy, as the only means of satisfaction to an immortal soul, as the only way of enjoyment here, and eternal happiness hereafter; and should this subject, under the Divine blessing, be instrumental in exciting one youthful heart to seek from God the *early* manifestation of this mercy to itself, we shall have reason to rejoice through all eternity that ever it was brought before our notice. We have here the young Christian's prayer, and his expectation. I shall speak—

#### I. OF THE PRAYER IN THE TEXT.

#### II. OF THE EXPECTATION CONNECTED WITH IT.

I. The text contains a prayer to be satisfied early with God's mercy. Now, this implies the absence of present satisfaction, the want of something unpossessed; and this is remarkably man's condition while here below; he is never fully satisfied, there is always the want of something more.

The nearest approach to satisfaction is in the real Christian, who is walking with God upon earth, and waiting to go to his home in heaven; but even he is not fully satisfied. Hear what the man after God's own heart says: "I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness." He is not satisfied at present, he has no hope of perfect satisfaction till he reaches heaven; but he expects it there. Not but that there is a degree of satisfaction, a certain repose of mind, a contentment and an enjoyment to be found on earth, when sought for in a right channel, which is inestimably valuable, "more to be desired than gold, more precious than rubies, sweeter than honey and the honey-comb; all the things thou canst desire are not to be compared to it." And this I conceive is sought in the prayer of my text, "O satisfy us!"

You may observe how every human being seems to have some notion that there is a satisfaction to be found somewhere, and, therefore, all mankind are active in the search thereof. The child seeks it in his toy, the youth in his sports, and the man of pleasure in his gratifications; but they find it not there! The infant perhaps approaches the nearest to his object; but even *he* grows tired of his toy, and thus reads to children of a larger growth an instructive lesson of the unsatisfying nature of earthly objects—a lesson fully confirmed by the experience of riper years: for hear the testimony of Solomon, a man whose opportunities for judging were the greatest possible, “for what can a man do that cometh after the king.” He says, “Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.” (Eccles. ii. 10, 11.) The covetous man would fain find satisfaction in his money; but does he find it? No! “He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase.” The student seeks it in knowledge, but even here it is not found, “for the eye is not satisfied with seeing nor the ear with hearing; and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.” Others seek it in religion; but how do many seek it there? Being ignorant of God’s righteousness, they go about to establish their own righteousness, they thank God, like the Pharisee, that they are not as other men are; yet can it be said that they are really satisfied? Too well satisfied they generally are, but it is a satisfaction which an alarming illness will often shake, and a death-bed utterly sweep away. At best, it is the repose of a man asleep in a storm, insensible that he is sinking in the waves.

There is, however, one character who seeks aright. The penitent seeks to be satisfied *with the Divine mercy*. He includes all other blessings in that one gift,—mercy. He pours out the whole desire of his heart in that one prayer, “God be merciful to me a sinner.” And if he can obtain *that*, it is enough! For the *present* he is satisfied, for the *future* he can trust. And well he may, for if the Lord has mercy upon him, there is no other blessing, but what he will impart to him. This secures the pardon of all his sins, and the possession of all good. This betokens the Divine favour and love, the favour and love of Him, whose power and wisdom are infinite.

And what does a prayer for mercy imply? It necessarily implies a sense of the need of mercy, a consciousness of being a sinner, a condemned perishing sinner, and an earnest desire to experience that forgiveness which can only be bestowed through the

mercy of God. The Pharisee, of whom we read in the Gospel for the day (Luke xviii.), never prayed for mercy, he did not feel that he needed it. We are all taught to pray for mercy; our daily language in this house of prayer is, "Lord have mercy upon us, have mercy upon us, miserable sinners." But, my dear brethren, what is the mere cry for mercy, if the need of mercy is not really felt? What means the prayer for pardon, when the soul feels not that it is condemned? Mark the earnest entreaty of the text, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy," in connexion with the confessions which had preceded it, "We are consumed by thine anger and by thy wrath we are troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance." Ah! we can never hope the cry of the soul for mercy will be sincerely raised, till the need of it is deeply felt: and that need will not be felt till the nature of sin, as committed against a holy God, be in some measure understood, and its awful consequences discovered. Even then, it will not be sought from God, until he is known as a merciful and gracious God, as a God ready to pardon; and he cannot be so known excepting as revealed in Christ Jesus. The mercy of God, is the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The prayer for mercy then, if rightly offered, is a prayer to be washed from sin in the blood of Christ, a prayer to know and experience the dying love of the Saviour, in having borne our punishment and purchased for us salvation, a prayer to be made new creatures in Christ Jesus, a prayer for a new heart and a right spirit, and for grace to do and suffer all the righteous will of God. God can be merciful only in accordance with his truth and justice; and it is through the atoning sacrifice of the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world, and through the perfect obedience of Christ to all his Father's law, that truth and justice can unite with love and mercy, and the pardon of the sinner be secured while the holiness of God is vindicated. Now, my dear young friends, have you ever been brought to feel your need of mercy? Do you know what it is to feel the burden of sin? I mean not of this or that particular act of guilt, but the sinfulness of your heart. You may have been preserved from outward acts of sin, but your nature is corrupt; your hearts are wicked, desperately wicked. Have you felt this? Do you feel it? and are you conscious that till pardoned through the atoning sacrifice of Christ, and justified by his righteousness, and renewed by his grace, and guided by his Spirit, you are in a state of condemnation, lost, your soul lost, so that if you die in that state you are for ever lost? Oh! if you know and feel this, surely you will adopt the prayer of my text, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy;" "early," that is, in the morning of life, in the time of youth, before years have been consumed in vanity and sin, before the mind has been hardened or prejudiced. "Early," that if life be spared it may be spent in

the enjoyment of God's favour, and the fulfilment of his will; or if cut short, an early grave may be an early entrance into glory. It is a great blessing when youth is brought to feel the need of mercy; when in early days the heart is convinced that nothing but an interest in Christ, and the renewing influences of his grace, and a participation in his great salvation, can satisfy the soul. It is indeed an indescribable blessing to be early turned aside from the vain pursuits of earth, and to be made willing to come to Jesus, and in the prayer of penitence and faith to cry, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy." Is it thus, has it been thus with any who now hear me? O! I trust it is. I hope I speak in the hearing of many a youthful heart that has been led to pray for mercy through a Saviour. May it not be said of you as it was of Saul of Tarsus, "Behold he prayeth!" If so, you are assuredly in the way to be satisfied with God's mercy.

It is possible that some around you may suggest—All this is needless; the innocence of youth requires no such change; the moral, and the amiable, and the pleasing qualities of unsophisticated nature, are in themselves enough to recommend the youthful heart to the favour and the beneficence of an infinitely gracious God. Oh! believe me, this is but the voice of Satan speaking through his deluded votaries. It is the ruinous, destructive, fatal falsehood of the father of lies. God is a God of mercy only through the atonement and mediation of Christ: if you renounce the atonement, you renounce all well-grounded hopes of mercy, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sin, there is no more hope of salvation. Let me guard all my youthful hearers against that dreadful delusion of *hoping* in the mercy of God, without a reference to the *only* revealed way of mercy:—God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and unless our faith is fixed upon a Divine Redeemer, all the amiable qualities, all the endearing charms which nature gives, or art or education fosters or improves, will be as valueless in the sight of God as the glow-worm's light would be useless in the blaze of the meridian sun. If you desire the Divine mercy, it is yours; but it must be sought through a Saviour. You must cast yourself, as a guilty sinner, upon that mercy which is offered freely through Christ Jesus. Seeking it through him you will not fail to find it; and in finding it you will find all that you can desire for your present comfort, and for your everlasting joy and happiness.

This brings us to notice—

II. The expectation which the youthful Christian may reasonably indulge, in connexion with the petition we have been considering. He asks to experience the Divine mercy, that he may rejoice and be glad all the days of his life. Youth is confessedly the season for joy and gladness, before the wings of hope

have been clipped ; before the heavier cares of life have pressed down the heart ; before the chilling blights of disappointment have withered the soul ! But where shall this joy and gladness be found ? Tell me ye who have lived in pleasure as it is called, have you found them there ? Yes ! methinks I hear some youthful buoyant heart reply ! Yes ! if you wish to see the rejoicing heart and the glad countenance, go to the mirthful and the gay, go to the theatre, or the midnight revel, or the race course. I should be sorry to go to any of them ; but if I did go, I should not expect to find true joy or gladness there. There is no proof of real joy and gladness in laughter and boisterous merriment, any more than in the smiles and carelessness of the world. The wisest of men has said of such laughter, "It is madness !" Were you passing through the wards of a receptacle for lunatics, and heard the loud laugh, the shout of merriment, the peals of laughter from its inmates, would you call them happy ; especially when you saw the chains that held the sufferers' limbs, or the bars and bolts that fastened their cells ? And is it not madness to be living for time, and neglecting eternity ? My dear hearers, look at the page of inspired truth ; what is written there ? Is it not written, that to live in pleasure is to be dead while living ? Can the dead rejoice and be glad ? Look again, "The carnal mind is enmity against God." Can an enemy to God be happy ? Impossible ! There is, I grant you, a sort of enjoyment in such pursuits as we have alluded to, but it is mere animal enjoyment, it is partaken of only in common with the beasts that perish ; it is the mirth of thoughtlessness, the joy of inconsideration, the gaiety of childishness. You see the infant sporting at a mother's grave ; you see the child amused by what the man of reflection views with terror and alarm ; but you do not see the condemned criminal dancing to the scaffold. And think you, that if the thoughtless votary of dissipation read a handwriting on the wall, that told him of the fate of those "that forget God," he would find joy and gladness amidst the festive scenes of this world's folly ? No ! It is ignorance, and thoughtlessness, and forgetfulness of God, that suffer men to seem happy amidst the round of dissipation, in which the sons and daughters of earth are living ! Would you see real joy and gladness of heart, you must seek them in the paths which the giddy multitude shun as gloomy, dull, and wearisome. You must seek them in wisdom's ways : "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." The enlightened soul knows this, and therefore prays to taste the loving-kindness of the Lord with this object in view, "O satisfy us early with thy mercy ; that we may rejoice and be glad all our days."

Some, perhaps, will doubt whether scripture or experience warrants such an expectation. I would gladly put the whole question to this test, if only my young hearers would but abide by the decision. The word of God declares that the service of God

is perfect freedom ; that the believer is the only really happy character ; that true Christians may be glad and rejoice continually ; that walking in the light of God's countenance, they may rejoice with joy unspeakable, their hearts being filled with joy and gladness. I must not attempt to quote the passages of scripture which speak of the happiness of the people of God, but I will just remark that the text alludes to this joy as being permanent "all their days." Now here is the excellence of spiritual joy and gladness, namely, that its value is most powerfully felt in times of trouble and affliction, when the wordling is overwhelmed with misery. Paul and Silas sang praises at midnight, when their outward circumstances were most calamitous. The prophet Habakkuk resolved to rejoice in the Lord, and to joy in the God of his salvation, when all around him was destitution, and wretchedness, and misery ; and the apostle exhorted his afflicted brethren to rejoice evermore, to rejoice in the Lord alway. Can any thing but real religion enable the soul to do this ? And mark how well calculated the sense of mercy is to give such joy and gladness. Would not a condemned criminal be joyful when he received a free pardon, a prisoner when he was bid to go free, a starving beggar when invited to a feast, a pauper when put into possession of an estate, a peasant when adopted by a prince ? Yes ! and all this the gospel does for those who experience the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. How glad must the heart of that poor sinner have been, who heard her Saviour say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee, go in peace." How rejoiced the dying thief, when Jesus told him, "This day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Let me appeal to experience. Go and ask the devoted Christian whether religion has not made him happier ? Go to the young convert, who, like the sun rising from the mists which obscure the first break of day, through clouds of doubt and penitential tears, dares scarcely call himself a Christian, and inquire whether in his sorrow for sin, and fears and alarms, he finds not something to make up for what he has renounced ? Go ask the dying believer, lingering out week after week, perhaps month after month, a life of pain, and weakness, and disease, whether to rejoice and be glad is not the privilege of such a state ? One and all will tell you, "Yes," without one moment's hesitation : they will testify that a sense of Divine mercy can enable the happy possessors thereof to rejoice and be glad in the day of their affliction. It is not then a vain expectation. The Bible pronounces the child of God to be the only really happy character, and daily experience confirms the statement.

But is this all ? No ! The Christian's enjoyment upon earth is only an imperfect foretaste, a very feeble intimation of the joy and gladness, the everlasting joy, the never-ending glad-

ness that awaits him when days and years shall be no more—when the one eternal day shall have dawned to which no night belongs. They who are satisfied with the mercy of God here, shall be satisfied with his glory hereafter; and they who *early* share that mercy shall spend their days on earth in the enjoyment of its blessings, and then at length be called to the full possession of that bliss, which the love of Him, who is the procuring cause of all mercy, has prepared for them in Heaven. They who pray to be satisfied early with the mercy of God, shall praise him for its blessings in time and to all eternity.

And now, in making some application of this subject, I would address myself—

1st. To those who have not experienced that satisfaction which the Divine mercy alone can yield. And what my dear youthful hearers shall I say, to excite you to adopt the prayer of my text? Have you ever considered that either mercy or wrath must be your portion—that if you come not to Christ you are lost for ever? You own this; but you are hoping to find mercy of the Lord before you die. I should have the same hope concerning you, if I knew that this hope excited you to pray; but a prayerless soul is a hopeless soul. Besides, death may be much nearer than you think for. The young and healthful are often called away; and what if the fatal disease which again prevails should seize on your frame, or what if a sick bed should find you without any comfortable sense of mercy? What if God should, in his providence, appoint that a cold caught in this church to-night should confine you to your chamber, never more to hear the message of truth delivered in the public assembly? What if mistaken kindness should keep you in ignorance of your danger till death stared you in the face, and so found you unprepared? Or, suppose some injudicious adviser should recommend that no Minister, or Christian friend, should be admitted to speak to you in the name of a God of mercy, lest agitation should aggravate your illness? Or, suppose some denier of God's truth should whisper in your ear "You can have no need to fear, all must be well with you in another world; you have lived so innocently and amiably in this"—and you should give ear to the sad delusion; or, detecting it, should have no guide to lead you to the cross of Christ! Oh! my dear young friends, I am only supposing what you know is possible; and I remind you of its possibility that you may be excited now to adopt the prayer of my text for yourselves, and say, "O satisfy me early with thy mercy." **EARLY**, that is **NOW**—in the time of youth and health—now, while I can attend to these things—now, while I can judge and act for myself. Then, however near the bed of sickness and the chamber of death may be, you will find them cheered by the mercy of your God. Religion, so far from being dreaded as a gloomy or alarming theme, will be hailed as your solace and your

joy; you will rejoice and be glad all the day long. Or, if life and health be your portion, every comfort will be doubled, every gratification enhanced, by a sense of the mercy of your God; you will rejoice and be glad all your days.

I may this evening be speaking in the ears of some who are listening to the last sermon they will ever hear. Let me then close my message to your souls with an affectionate invitation to you to come and taste the loving-kindness of the Lord. He is of great mercy, he delighteth in mercy—ask it in the name of Jesus, and you shall most assuredly find mercy. From whatever motive, or with whatever feeling, you may have entered this house of prayer; whatever your past neglect may have been, if you sincerely desire mercy, now seek the Lord and you shall find him; return unto the Lord and he will have mercy upon you, and to our God, and he will abundantly pardon.

I must speak also to those who hope in God's mercy, to those who are looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life; and I would entreat you, my dear young friends, to be earnest in prayer, that you may know more and more of the riches of Divine mercy and grace in Christ Jesus. This is the most satisfying thing in the world. To increase in riches or in human estimation, will not necessarily add to your happiness; but the more you experience the loving-kindness of the Lord, the more you comprehend the love of Christ, the happier you must be. Whatever else you sacrifice, whatever else you forego, oh! never, never hazard the loss of this blessing. I speak to some in whose spiritual welfare I may be allowed to express the liveliest interest; I allude to those whose progress in the Divine life it has been my privilege to watch over, from their first open profession of faith in God's mercy at confirmation, and subsequently at the Lord's table. There are, perhaps, others here present who have been led to pray for mercy through some affliction or illness, from loss of friends or relations, from some alarming Providence, or some serious admonition, or some awakening ministry. But whatever or whoever the instrument, let me now entreat you, while youth, and health, and strength, and time and opportunity, are given you, oh! seek to grow in grace, seek to live near to God, seek to be exercising constant dependence on Christ, be diligent in the use of means, be careful to avoid whatever may check your spiritual progress, ungodly companions and scenes of temptation. If you would avoid dying regrets, beware of spiritual declension—fly from whatever may lower your standard of duty, or lessen your enjoyment of your privileges; and if, in the providence of God, you should be laid on a couch of sickness, remember how far more important is the welfare of the soul than the health of the body. Listen not to the suggestions of those who would exclude the minister of mercy from the chamber of sickness; if your soul is a

partaker of mercy, the communion of saints will tend rather to sooth and comfort than to alarm ; if not, the sooner you know your real condition the better, however alarming or agitating. Would you wish to be lulled asleep by a delusion from which you can only awake in eternal misery ? Act rationally in religion—act as you would in other things—use the means, pray for a blessing on them. Seek the Lord early, encouraged by his promise that those who so seek him shall find him. And now, my beloved young friends, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace ; may he guide you with his counsel here, and receive you to glory hereafter ; may he make you sensible of the value of your present privileges, and give you grace to improve them, to the present comfort and prosperity of your souls, and to their future eternal salvation.

THE END.



